



Children & Family News

December 2003

N.D. Dept. of Human Services' Children & Family Services Division Update

DHS Awards Contract for SSI Benefit Determination

The N.D. Department of Human Services has contracted with F. M. Blake and Associates to help eligible foster children apply for SSI benefits beginning in December. This process entails file reviews, contact with case managers, medical providers, and occasionally foster parents. If contacted by an F.M. Blake representative, human service professionals are asked to assist, as needed.

There are several benefits of determining SSI eligibility for these children. Many foster children eventually return home to their parents. However, caring for a child with disabilities can pose a significant financial stress on families. An SSI benefit increases family financial stability and significantly reduces the risk of foster care re-entry.

Children who are screened and determined eligible for SSI benefits are also more likely to receive appropriate medical and psychological treatment because of the extensive diagnostic evaluation necessary to establish eligibility. Appropriate treatment helps decrease time in foster care too.

DHS is also able to apply the SSI benefit to the cost of the child's care. Foster care costs typically exceed the SSI benefit, but the state will be able to capture additional federal dollars for these costs.

Individuals with questions should call Tom Pomonis at the Children and Family Services Division, (701) 328-3701.

CFS Review Program

Improvement Plan Approved

The federal Children's Bureau approved the North Dakota Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan (PIP) effective November 13, 2003. The program improvement plan was developed in response to the September 2001 review conducted in North Dakota.

All states are participating in the federal review process, which is intended to enhance child welfare services.

"I would like to congratulate Grand Forks, Burleigh, Morton, and Cass counties for their participation in the 2001 review. From the information I have received, North Dakota was in 'substantial conformity' with more of the federal standards than any other state!" said Children and Family Services Division Director Paul Ronningen.

North Dakota was commended for:

- Initiating child maltreatment investigations promptly,
- Providing services to families to prevent child removal and to protect children
- Setting and working toward permanency goals,
- Placing children near their families and encouraging visitation when appropriate, and
- Involving parents in case planning and meeting the education and physical health needs of children in care

Ronningen said there is still work to do in the following areas:

- Repeat maltreatment. N.D.'s incidence of repeat maltreatment for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 1999 (11.7%), was higher than the national standard of 6.1%.
- Risk of harm to child. In 22% of the cases, reviewers determined that the risk of harm to children was not adequately addressed.
- Foster care re-entries. During FFY 1999, 16.3% of the children entering foster care in N.D. were re-entering care within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. This exceeds the national standard of 8.6%.
- Needs and services of children, parents, and foster parents. In 25% of the cases reviewed, reviewers determined that the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents had not been adequately met.

- Worker visits with children. In 22% of the cases, reviewers determined that visits between the workers and the children did not meet state policy recommendations and/or were not sufficient to ensure safety and well-being.
- Mental health needs. Reviewers indicated that in 20% of the applicable cases, the child's mental health needs were not adequately addressed.

To address these challenges, the North Dakota Program Improvement Plan has three major components: 1) implementation of the wraparound process for case management, 2) regional reviews that mirror the federal review, and 3) training and curriculum development for caseworkers and supervisors. The plan can be found at www.state.nd.us/humanservices.

All states must submit progress reports quarterly to federal officials. North Dakota's first report will include information about activities this past year that move the state toward compliance with federal standards and will cover the period of time through February 2004.

ICWA/ASFA Forums Scheduled

The Native American Training Institute and the N.D. Court Improvement Project are hosting Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) /Adoption Safe Families Act (ASFA) Compliance Improvement

Forums, in December and January at several locations in the state. Registration is free.

The forums are intended to generate dialogue about the challenges, strengths, and weaknesses of ICWA and ASFA. Topics to be covered may include: placement preferences, qualified expert witnesses, cultural implications in ASFA and ICWA, enrollment issues, training needs, data gathering, and collaboration efforts for reporting.

The forums are open to all interested persons and will benefit attorneys, judges, state, county, and tribal social workers;

counselors; school personnel; child care workers; foster parents; adoption workers; health workers; tribal council members; BIA/Tribal enrollment workers; and law enforcement and juvenile justice professionals.

Forums will run from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Pre-registration is required. To register or for information, contact the Native American Training Institute at (701) 255-6374.

Adoption Month Activities Raise Awareness

Lt. Governor Jack Dalrymple joined department staff, adoption professionals, and families as they celebrated Adoption Month, November 19 in Bismarck. While honoring all adoptive families, the event also focused on the special placement needs of some foster children.

Department Executive Director Carol K. Olson presented the Special Needs Adoptive Family of the Year Award, Adoption Advocate Awards, and the Adoption Triad Award, which honors open adoptions.

The celebrating resumed on Saturday, November 22nd as 11 North Dakota

families and about 300 relatives and friends gathered in Fargo for a special day in court. The East Central Judicial District Court opened to finalize adoptions of 16 former foster children, ranging in age from 8 months to 11 years. This marked the first time North Dakota has participated in National

Adoption Day.

Both events were well attended and drew attention to the need for more foster and adoptive parents. In 2002, 328 adoptions were completed in North Dakota. Of these, 79 involved adoptions of children with special needs who were adopted from the foster care system.

ICWA/ASFA Forum Schedule

Wed., Dec. 10

Sky Dancer Casino, Belcourt

Thurs., Dec. 11

Spirit Lake Casino, Spirit Lake

Tues., Jan. 13

Prairie Knights Casino, Fort Yates

Wed., Jan. 14

Four Bears Casino, New Town

N.D. Department of Human Services Children & Family Services Division

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